

**LAMAR UNIVERSITY**

Week 5 Background – Exploring Ways for Continuous Improvement of your Action Research Project

By this week you should have had provide an opportunity to review your draft action research plan, confer with your site supervisor and reach consensus on your question(s) or topic(s) and design of your action research plan, and uploaded your draft action research plan into your intern plan in the electronic portfolio. This week you will examine and analyze some strategies for assessing your action research project.

You will also have an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned so far in developing your action research project. We will ask you to describe what you have learned about identifying, designing, planning, and beginning to implement your action research project.

Remember, your action research plan, process, progress and project may take several weeks or several months to complete. One of the key goals of this course is providing an effective blueprint, a how to conduct an effective action research project in collaboration with your site supervisor(s), peers, Instructional Associates, and university faculty.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Examine and analyze strategies to assess action research.
- 2) Reflect on lessons learned about developing an action research project.

Performance Outcomes:

- 1) Identify strategies for assessing action research.
- 2) Describe lessons learned about planning an action research project.

Rubric

Use the following Rubric to guide your work on the Week 5 Assignment.

Tasks	Accomplished The evidence suggests that this work is a "Habit of Mind." The educator is ready to mentor others in this area.	Proficient The evidence suggests that performance on this work matches that of a strong educator.	Needs Improvement The evidence does not yet make the case for the educator being proficient at this task.
Action Research – Identifying quality indicators assessing action research	Students identify all five quality indicators and describe how each indicator may be used to assess and improve their actions research. To be accomplished, each student also discusses how he or she can use these indicators to improve their action research plan. (10 Points)	Student briefly identifies the five quality indicators, but does not discuss how the indicators may improve his or her action research plan. Student may receive one extra point if he or she describes how he or she may use the indicators to improve the action research. (5 – 9 Points)	Student only describes some of the quality indicators and does not discuss how the strategies may improve his or her action research plan. (0 – 4 Points)
Final Reflection	Students write a thorough reflection, at least one page in length, highlighting what has been learned in this action research course, and the student provides at least three references to course resources (e.g., lectures, readings, assignments, discussion boards, electronic searches, blogs, etc.) supporting their reflection. (3 Points)	Students provide a reflection describing what they learned in this course, but fail to provide adequate references supporting their reflection. Adequate references must include at least three references to course resources as sources of their learning. (2 Points)	Students provide a partial description of what they learned in the course but without any references to course resources. (1 Point)
Assignment Mechanics	Responses are relevant to course content; no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Students demonstrate proper APA style. (3 Points)	Responses are relevant to course content; few errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. (2 Points)	Responses do not reflect knowledge of course content, lack clarity and depth, and/or include multiple errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. (1 Point)

Week Five Assignment, Part 1 – Assessing the quality of inquiry in your action research

In order to continually improve your action research project, the professors are suggesting that you identify and apply some strategies for ongoing assessment of your action research project. This activity should provide you with some strategies to address this ongoing review process. Please read Chapter 6, The Continuing Journey as “Head Learner,” in the Dana text, and carefully review the section “What Are Some Quality Indicators for Practitioner Research,” pp. 179 – 186. Identify each of the quality indicators and describe how this indicator will help you assess your action research.

Workspace

Complete your work for Part 1 of Assignment 5 below. The boxes will expand as you type.

Quality Indicator 1

Context of Study

There are multiple quality indicators useful for assessing and improving educator inquiry. The first such indicator is Context of Study, which examines the context, or setting, within which the research work was performed. The context may include information about the school or district, students or staff, and content or curriculum. The context of the study is essential to understanding the setting framing the action research project. Context information potentially impacts both the quality and the transferability of the research performed, and is essential to helping other researchers determine the applicability of this study to their situation. A careful evaluation of the context of their study is essential for an action researcher to understand the setting within which they base their study, and to ensure that all elements influencing the context have been identified and are understood.

Examining the context within which my action research plan is implemented is vital to make sure I am seeing the complete picture; a critical evaluation of the environment holistically helps to insure that influences affecting the research process are identified, documented and understood. Thoroughly defining and describing the context early in my project, with an eye towards eventual assessment, will enhance my ability to concisely share my findings at project conclusion.

Quality Indicator 2

Wondering(s) and Purpose

Quality Indicator 2, Wondering(s) and Purpose, examines the question(s) that led the principal to undertake action research, and typically clarifies not only the wondering itself, but why that wondering was personally important to the principal. The wondering should be connected to relevant research and literature from the appropriate field. The wonderings, or questions, must be expressed clearly without the use of professional jargon. The stated purpose of the research must reflect an inward focus toward improving the principal's own practice, and the questions posed must be open-ended questions to which the principal did not know the answer. As educators, we must always think like assessors, so critically assessing why a wondering is of personal importance, and clearly expressing the wondering in relation to relevant research and literature early in the project, facilitates accountability and accurate documentation of project purpose.

Concentrating on clearly understanding and expressing my wondering and why it is important to me will help focus my research and better define the purpose of my project. This critical quality indicator also prompts reflection upon my wondering, insuring that I am truly asking open-ended questions and approaching the inquiry with an open mind.

Quality Indicator 3

Principal Research Design (Data Collection and Data Analysis)

Data collection is an essential element of action research, and the data sources, such as test scores or interviews, must be examined as a component of the research assessment process. Data collection strategies must be detailed, and must be logically consistent with the wondering that sparked the research. Explanations must be provided regarding data collection procedures, timelines, and analysis procedures and techniques. As data is the heart of an action research project, the Principal Research Design Quality Indicator is crucial to insure the integrity and validity of the research. Just as we must assess the data analysis process for accuracy, we must also assess the data collection process itself for integrity and appropriateness; it is easy to select data sources that while accurate are not pertinent to answering the question at hand.

As I conduct my inquiry, Quality Indicator 3 provides excellent guidance regarding examining the sources of data I will select, along with my data collection and analysis procedures. The critical supporting role data plays in the research process means that nothing can be taken for granted; I must question my choice of data sources, data collection and analysis methods to insure the underpinnings of the project are sound, and evaluate the pertinence of the data itself so as to facilitate sharing my findings at project conclusion. While examining the data, it is also critical as the project progresses to insure that sensitive data I have collected is secure and not compromised or inadvertently revealed through my findings. Data confidentiality measures I undertake may range from removing personally identifiable information from testing results to redacting names from interview transcripts.

Quality Indicator 4**Principal-Researcher Learning**

Quality Indicator 4, Principal-Researcher Learning, assesses the stage during which educators clearly and thoughtfully relate what they have learned through the action research process. The researcher's statements of learning must reference detailed data supporting their findings; if applicable, information should also be provided to explain why any disparate data does not counter their findings. While articulating their learning, principal-researchers typically interject relevant readings and experiences into the discussion so as to provide a complete picture of their research methodology, along with reflection upon what was learned during the inquiry process.

Examining my action research project with an eye towards assessment, this quality indicator provides guidance as I articulate project findings and document both project learning and supporting data. A beneficial lesson is derived from this indicator as to the need to explain the presence of any disparate data and why or how it does not counter project findings; it would be easy to overlook this step which is vital to legitimizing the project outcome. This quality indicator really clarifies the need for me to present a picture of project learning that is complete with supporting data and a sense of all project experiences and mindsets.

Quality Indicator 5**Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice are revealed as the practitioner articulates the changes that have been or will be undertaken as a result of the learning gained through the research process. The changes in practice are the logical result of the lessons learned, expressed in the researcher's statements of learning. The principal-researcher may also address future wonderings resulting from the knowledge acquired through this action research project. This quality indicator reminds us as we undertake action research that the implications of the learning for changing our practices is not necessarily a destination to attain, but potentially the start of further journeys of inquiry.

As I undertake my action research project as an educator practitioner looking to improve instruction, the implications for my practice seem like the carrot dangling at the end of the stick; however, this quality assessment indicator reminds me that the more I learn, the more I may question, and the journey is as important as the destination. It is essential to include these new wonderings when presenting the findings of my research, as they are evidence of my ongoing inquiry, reflection and drive to improve.

Remember in addition to identifying the quality indicator, be sure to describe any ways you might be able to use these indicators to improve your action research.

Week Five Assignment, Part 2 – Final Reflections

Write a reflection describing highlights of this course and include any insights from the following:

- Lectures
- Readings
- Searches, like electronic searches of topics and questions
- Assignments and activities
- Discussion Board
- Blogs

The reflection may be as long as needed, but should be at least one page in the assignment space below. Also be sure to provide accurate APA citations (e.g., if you reference a passage or quote from one of the texts be sure to give credit so readers may know the source of your citation).

Blog – You may wish to post some of your reflections or provide readers with insights into your future implementation of your action research project.

Workspace

Complete your work for Part 2 of Assignment 5 below. The boxes will expand as you type....

Before participating in EDLD 5301 Research, I was unfamiliar with the term “action research”. Unlike “traditional” research in which professional researchers or academicians conduct research under clinical conditions to answer significant questions, action research is performed by educators in the course of their work, seeking to answer questions and address issues that are more personal or localized in nature so as to improve their practice. Because action research describes a process in which research is performed by educator-practitioners, it is often referred to as practitioner inquiry. Action research is characterized by a systematic process of inquiry; this inquiry is highlighted by the importance of reflection and critical examination of current practices. Action research is also synergistic in nature in that the end product is the creation of knowledge that transcends the sum of the gathered information.

Although I always recognized the importance of performing research to identify best practices and answer questions, particularly related to special needs such as writing grants or seeking innovative solutions to technology problems, I previously viewed research primarily as an act, not a process. An important lesson derived from this course is that practitioner inquiry must be ongoing; research is not a task to be performed only when questions need to be answered, but rather an important element of the growth process and the continual improvement of one’s practice. Therefore, although a research project may be performed on a specific subject, answering questions and resulting in findings to be shared at project conclusion, we must be wary not to close the book on the *process* of research. Dana (2009) provides insight that “...*administrator inquiry is a continual cycle that all educators spiral through throughout their professional lifetimes. It is a professional positioning or stance where questioning, systematic study, and, subsequently, improving one’s practice becomes a natural part of an administrator’s work...*”

The role that our passions as administrators play in our wonderings was an interesting revelation. I now understand that as we seek to improve our practices, the wonderings, or questions we all ask, tend to lie within one of nine general areas of passion, or categories. These areas include Staff Development, Individual Teacher(s), Individual Student(s), and Social Justice and Equity Issues among others. Recognizing which area of passion our wonderings lie within helps focus and direct our action research efforts, and is critical input to the context, or setting, of our action research plan. I realized through this journey that my strongest area of passion lies within the Individual Student(s) area, as I seek to use instructional technology to level the academic playing field and help every student reach their potential, regardless of their background or challenges.

A highlight of this class has also been the knowledge I have gained regarding the importance of reflection. Although we all tend to review what we have done, particularly when we have made a mistake, reflection in this sense implies a deeper level of analysis, focused on identifying both what we know and what we do not know. As Harris, Edmonson and Combs (2010) point out, “*Reflection allows one to see what is unknown so that one can begin to understand, which ultimately informs change.*” If we do not know what is unknown, it is easy for us to believe we are well-informed based solely on our knowledge; reflection is critical to remind us how much there is to learn, and to help us confront our assumptions and predispositions as we begin the inquiry process.

The need for performing qualitative as well as quantitative research was also a revelation to me,

and was most apparent after watching the Week Two school leader video interviews included in our courseware. With my background in data analysis and statistics, I have always tended to focus on quantitative data, and shunned any form of information that could not be quantified as being too subjective to be useful. Watching educators such as Dr. Johnny Briseño, Principal at Rancho Isabella Elementary in Angleton ISD, espouse the virtues of getting to know the students and their life situation, and the value of using this qualitative data as valid and essential input to the instructional improvement process, was a real eye-opener. I have learned that quantitative data, while essential, does not provide a complete picture on student achievement; qualitative data is essential to understand why some students or classes exhibit particular behaviors that either facilitate or interfere with learning, and this qualitative data is essential to the improvement process. My reflection must now include examining what I really know (and don't know) qualitatively about those I am instructing or managing, and how this impacts my decisions, their actions and our interactions.

The final gems of information embedded within this course were the research, analysis and reporting tools. From the planning templates designed to clarify and focus action research plans to analysis models, this course has better equipped me to organize and analyze information, as well as to examine *all* factors influencing the status quo. Force Field Analysis will help me analyze the forces driving for change as well as the forces resisting change, allowing me to more accurately gauge a project's potential for success. The Delphi Method will be implemented as an inquiry and decision-making tool within my own action research efforts, minimizing the effects of any political or positional influence of committee members over one another while facilitating attainment of consensus.

In summary, EDLD 5301 Research provided knowledge of tools and methods essential to the improvement of my practice as an educational leader. The action research process itself is critical not just to my own development, but to the advancement of my District and all the initiatives in which I am involved. As Ringler (2007) reminds us, "*As school leaders, it is important to understand the action research process as an effective tool for improving teaching and learning.*" Action research empowers us as leaders, but most importantly, transforms us into instruments of change; Diane Revilla (2010), one of my EDLD 5301 classmates, summed it up best in her Discussion Board posting by stating that "*In developing my Action Research Project I felt empowered by initiating the inquiry research on an issue our campus has had for four years. By taking the Leadership role, I feel I am making a difference in our campus.*"

References:

Dana, Nancy F. (2009). *Leading with Passion and Knowledge: The Principal as Action Researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA:Corwin. p. 171.

Harris, Sandra; Edmonson, Stacy; & Combs, Julie (2010). *Examining What We Do to Improve Our Schools: 8 Steps from Analysis to Action*. Larchmont, NY:Eye on Education. p. 49.

Ringler, Marjorie C. (2007). Action Research an Effective Instructional Leadership Skill for Future Public School Leaders. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, 4(1), 27-37.

Revilla, Diane (2010, August 12). *Lamar Epic Learning Management System, Week 5 Discussion Board*. Retrieved from <https://lamar.epiclms.net/learn/player.aspx>

Action Research Plan Status Update:

During Week Five I met briefly with my Site Supervisor, Dr. Tom Harvey. As mentioned in my Week Four Assignment, I had emailed Dr. Harvey my Revised Action Research Plan along with supplemental information including the modifications I made to the plan as the result of peer review. He stated that the plan looked good, approved my revised plan as submitted and posted last week on my blog, and gave the project the green light.

We also discussed my proposed use of the Delphi Method as a critical component of the software evaluation process, facilitating frequent interaction through the use of Web 2.0 tools while minimizing political maneuvering among committee members. Dr. Harvey agreed that the Delphi Method would help overcome the tendency of some committee members to either influence or be influenced by other members, and that the confidentiality inherent in the process should also make committee members more open and forthcoming with their concerns and questions.

Blog Posting of this update at <http://educatingforourfuture.blogspot.com/>

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 13, 2010

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Blog posting (abbreviated image due to size) of my Final Reflection at <http://educatingforourfuture.blogspot.com/>

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 13, 2010

Final Reflections on EDLD 5301 Research

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ABOUT ME



EDTECHMAN
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49-year-old lifelong
educator who loves

technology and the way it can
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